

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 262 651

FL 015 327

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TITLE Immersion Weekends: The Next Best Thing to Being There.
PUB DATE 85
NOTE 8p.; In: Meeting the Call for Excellence in the Foreign Language Classroom. Selected papers from the 1985 Central States Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (FL 015 312).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Educational Objectives; Foreign Language Films; French; *Group Activities; Higher Education; *Immersion Programs; Off Campus Facilities; *Program Effectiveness; Scheduling; *Second Language Instruction; State Universities; Student Leadership; *Weekend Programs

ABSTRACT

A French language immersion weekend housed in an off-campus college lodge and accommodating 12 college students has been successfully implemented by the State University College of New York at Fredonia. The goals of the weekend experiences have been: the development of listening and speaking skills; creation of a cultural atmosphere of the French-speaking world through films, recordings, and group activities; creation of an informal environment for students and faculty to meet to speak French; development of student leadership skills; provision of an opportunity for alumni French teachers in the region and local native French speakers to participate and meet students. Efforts to have participants speak only French have been successful and rewarding for students. Activities have included a treasure hunt, preparation of an authentic French meal, folk-dancing to the music of a faculty group, and an auction of French prizes done with counterfeit French money, which also served to pay penalties for not speaking French. Invitations and announcements were made in French, and students signed contracts binding themselves to speak only French. The most important factors in the program's success seemed to be faculty and student cooperation in creating a relaxed atmosphere supporting the efforts of novice speakers. (MSE)

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15 Immersion Weekends: The Next Best Thing to Being There

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The development of listening and speaking skills in a foreign language requires a great investment of time and energy. To create situations where such proficiencies can grow without transplanting people in a foreign setting is an ongoing challenge for language teachers. Holding an immersion weekend in the foreign language is one response that has been successfully implemented at the State University College in Fredonia, New York, during recent years.

Fredonia students and faculty who attended the French or the Spanish immersion weekends would describe the experience in terms of various recreation activities, good food, fellowship—in the foreign language—among students and faculty from many departments in the college. The college lodge provides a relaxed setting away from the English-speaking environment, where participants can live in French or Spanish for a sustained period of time without great expense. The budget need not be large, but the time and energy commitment on the part of the organizers is not small.

Goals

Those of us involved in teacher training may have goals for an immersion weekend that extend beyond those of classroom teachers. The following objectives were established for a weekend in French:

1. to develop listening and speaking skills in French,
2. to create a cultural atmosphere representing the French-speaking

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- world (i.e., Canada, Haiti, Belgium, and France) through the use of films, videotapes and participation in dances, meals, singing, one-act plays, a treasure hunt, and other recreational activities;
3. to create an environment where faculty, staff, and students from any department at the college can meet in an informal setting with the common goal of speaking French;
 4. to develop leadership skills in students (language club members, future teachers);
 5. to give alumni who teach French in regional schools the opportunity to share their language skills and cultural knowledge;
 6. to acquaint students with local native speakers.

Several factors that contribute to a successful weekend are: a relaxed setting; the presence of a few native speakers to provide cultural and linguistic input; willingness of all to speak only the language; additional language sources—films, records, video cassettes; good meals; physical activities to balance the mental effort of speaking only a foreign language; and plenty of options.

Student Leadership

It is possible for college students to take the initiative for arranging and conducting a weekend with a minimum of help from faculty. Two Fredonia students decided they wanted to organize a Spanish weekend similar to a successful French weekend that had taken place the previous year. The local Spanish faculty was very supportive. With cooperation from students and teachers, the weekend resulted in additional interest in an already active Spanish Club. Plans are underway for a second Spanish weekend in the spring of 1985, despite all the work involved.

Remembrances of a French Weekend

Once we set foot inside the college lodge, the rule of the game became "Ici, on parle français." During the ten-mile journey from the Fredonia campus to the rustic, unheated ski chalet where we would spend the next forty hours, it occurred to me that we might pass a silent weekend in a linguistic rebellion. Yet a *coup linguistique* of a happy sort took place

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as we stepped inside the lodge: all twelve overnighers began speaking French.

The long hours of preparation during the previous months were richly rewarded. A cheerful freshman with only five months of foreign language study behind her won the treasure hunt, and wore the treasure (a racing cap inscribed "équipe Française") with pride throughout the remainder of the weekend. A fourth-term French student announced after the weekend that during those forty hours she had "started to talk" French. Continuously throughout the weekend she had sought me out to announce, "C'est très amusant!" Gone forever was the frustration of a German major whose French vocabulary and structure surfaced more slowly than she would have liked.

Among the triumphs of the weekend were several culinary delights—*quiche*, *crêpes*, *coq-au-vin*, and *cerises flambées*. The twelve student overnighers served an elegant meal for forty people on Saturday evening complete with candlelight and flowers. The assistance of a native speaker on the Fredonia faculty and another French guest was invaluable.

The films *Le Ballon rouge* and *Les Borgnes sont des rois* were well received. Two events were the outstanding high points of the weekend: folk-dancing to the music of "The Newton Street Irregulars," a group of faculty musicians, was pure delight (the chairman of the geography department called dances in French) and an auction of French prizes conducted by the chair of the French department. Frenzied bidding for records, caps, and posters was done with counterfeit *francs* that had been distributed at the start of the weekend. (Anyone overheard speaking a language other than French was subject to losing his or her funds.)

Helpful Documents

Invitations and announcements in the foreign language set the tone for a French weekend. In addition to the translation of the schedule which follows, examples of other documents in French are appended to this article: an invitation to area teachers, a publicity spot in the student newspaper, an information flier, and a contract to be signed by participants committing themselves to speak only French.

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Schedule for the French Weekend

- FRIDAY 7:00 P.M. • leave Fenton Hall for the chalet
 • distribution of money by the management of the regional branch of the French Bank of SUC, Fredonia
 • refreshments, games, songs
 • two French films *The 400 Blows* (Truffaut) and *A Day in the Country* (Renoir)
- SATURDAY • dawn nature walk (optional!)
 • French breakfast
 • program to be announced
 • introduction to soccer
 • treasure hunt: follow the trail!
- 12:00 lunch (French menu)
 1:00 departure for the football game (for those who wish)
 1:00 to 4:30 free time: games, reading, outdoor walks, preparations for dinner, tables to set and decorate
 5:00 snack (fruit and *petits pains au chocolat* if possible)
 • French film or slides
 • songs, greeting the new arrivals
 • auction
 7:30 French dinner with singing at the table
 dishes (to be done rapidly)
 9:00 folk dancing to the music of the "Newton Street Irregulars"
 11:30 (or shortly after)— French film: *Shoot the Piano Player* (Truffaut)
- SUNDAY • It depends! Breakfast is certain!
 • poetry, walks, philosophy
 • French records
 • cleaning up the chalet
 11:00 A.M. return to the university
 Have a good trip home!

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Summary

A successful immersion weekend depends upon many factors. The most important seems to be the cooperation of faculty and students in creating a relaxed atmosphere that provides sufficient linguistic support to sustain the efforts of novice speakers. With such good will reigning, take the plunge. Your efforts will be far-reaching!

Appendix

Letter of Invitation

14 septembre 19—

Chers collègues

Les professeurs de français et le Cercle français de Fredonia ont le plaisir d'annoncer un week-end en français au chalet de l'université du 5 au 7 octobre. Cette immersion en français est destinée aux étudiants et aux professeurs de Fredonia aussi bien qu'aux professeurs des écoles des environs. Vous êtes invités à participer à tout le week-end ou au samedi soir seulement.

Le chalet se trouve à 12 miles de Fredonia dans un site tranquille près de Brocton. La description du programme prévu vous permettra de comprendre un peu l'esprit du week-end—une expérience en français où l'on s'amuse ensemble.

Si vous voulez être des nôtres, répondez à l'adresse ci-dessous. Les professeurs qui voudraient aider à organiser des jeux, des chansons ou quoi que ce soit seront accueillis à bras ouverts; veuillez nous contacter par écrit ou par téléphone. La date limite pour réserver votre place est le lundi 24 septembre.

En attendant d'avoir de vos nouvelles, nous vous prions d'accepter nos sentiments les plus sincères pour une année scolaire prospère.

Ad for Student Newspaper

UN WEEK-END EN FRANÇAIS LE 5, 6, 7 OCTOBRE

Étudiants, professeurs, amis francophones! Voulez-vous parler français dans l'ambiance du chalet de l'université un beau week-end d'automne?

\$15.00 Week-end complet (à partir de 19h00 vendredi à 11h00 dimanche)
ou

\$ 5.00 Samedi soir seulement (dîner, danses folkloriques, films)

Renseignements et réservations au laboratoire de langues avant 17h00, le 24 septembre. Paiement au moment de réserver.

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Information Flier

UN WEEK-END EN FRANÇAIS
au chalet de l'université SUC Fredonia
le 5, 6, 7 octobre

Départ: Vendredi, le 5 à 19h00 (7h00 du soir) de Fenton Hall

Retour: Dimanche, le 7 à 11h00 du matin

Moyen de transport: Mini-bus

Articles à apporter: Sac-à-dos ou couvertures, matelas pneumatique
Vêtements chauds! Pyjamas chauds et chaussettes!
Serviette, articles de toilette
Jeux, disques français, poésie
Deux paires de chaussure (au cas où il pleut)
Un crêpier (si vous en avez un)
Instruments de musique
Livres (2 ou 3 heures libres samedi après-midi)
Amis francophones!

Prix:	1) WEEK-END COMPLET	\$15.00
	(repas, trésor, prix, danses folkloriques, 3 ou 4 films)	
	ou	
	2) SAMEDI SOIR SEULEMENT	\$5.00
	(après 18h00 pour le dîner à 19h30, danses folkloriques, et film)	

(à détacher et à rendre au laboratoire de langues)

Nom _____ Adresse _____

Numéro de téléphone _____ Âge _____

Paiement: \$15.00 Week-end complet ou \$5.00 Samedi soir seulement

Méthode de payer: En espèce (argent comptant) ou chèque bancaire
payable à _____

Date limite pour payer: Avant 17h00 (5h00) lundi, le 24 septembre

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Promise to Speak French

***** SERMENT DE PARLER FRANÇAIS *****

Moi, soussigné(e), accepte de parler français pendant la durée du week-end du 5, 6, 7 octobre sous peine d'amende. Je comprends que l'argent distribué aux participants à l'arrivée au chalet sera repris d'après la règle de la banque régionale française de SUC Fredonia au cas où je parle une langue autre que le français.

(Signature de participant)

Signé ce _____ septembre 19__

(Signature de témoin)

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